The Edinburgh Association of Theological & other Students in aid of the diffusion of Christian knowledge
to
The Society of Inquiry on Missions: Theological Seminary, Princeton, New Jersey.

Edinr. 30th July 1835.

Dear Brethren

We received your communication of Jany. 28th with much pleasure & have to express our warmest thanks for the information it contains regarding the Churches of America. We are more & more impressed with the importance of extending our intercourse with those in other lands who are like minded with ourselves in regard to the glorious cause of the Redeemer. Such intercourse while it strengthens our hands, tends to enlarge our hearts; for who does not feel that the expansive principle of Christian love & fellowship is exceedingly apt to be cramped in its development by the prejudices of place & country. Our correspondence with America has now been kept up during several years & its importance is not likely soon to be lost sight of: for even were there no community of origin or of principle to interest us in each other, the attention of British Christians could not fail to be particularly drawn to the religious aspect of a country which promises to exert an influence so important on the rest of the world. The information you communicate regarding the valley of the Mississipi & the efforts now making for its spiritual cultivation are peculiarly interesting. When we consider the difficulty even in this country of overtaking the religious instruction of its overgrown population -- of providing thorough pastoral superintendence to the two millions & a half comprised within the narrow limits of Scotland, we cannot but feel that your Western States present a field for the exertions of American Christians whose vastness might overwhelm them with despair, were it any other than the cause of God in which they are engaged. But surely the efforts made to pervade such a region with the leaven of Christian principle are invested with moral grandeur & importance in no ordinary degree; bearing as they are likely to do not merely on the present population, but on the hundreds of millions of which the great Western valley appears at present to be but the cradle.

In reference to the subject of slavery, to which you allude you are aware how strong are the feelings of Christians on this side of the Atlantic. It is certainly one of the most melancholy specimens of human inconsistency & selfishness that by Britain & America, where the blessings of civil & religious liberty have been most fully enjoyed & most justly appreciated, slavery should so long have been tolerated. Britain has at length done justice to the Negro & let the oppressed go free:— we look anxiously for the time when America shall do the same. We are aware that your circumstances differ materially from ours: from the slave states must come the act of abolition, & with them therefore lies the heavy burden of guilt. But are the Northern states altogether blameless? if we have not been greatly misinformed, even in them the man of colour is regarded with such feelings of contempt & dislike as operate powerfully in rendering a large part of the population indifferent about the emancipation of the slaves & even hostile to those who would assert the rights of the negro. We rejoice to find that you do not give way to such prejudices; that you regard slavery as a sin & a dreadful evil, & that you are determined to use all means in your power for its removal. But you are afraid that the indiscreet zeal of some of its friends will tend to retard the cause. It may be so: zeal without knowledge has often been the cause of much mischief in this way. But let us remember that in matters of principle another error not less mischievous, & far more delusive is a timid or timeserving policy. In reference to this we would hold up for your warning the experience of the friends of Negro emancipation in this country. For more than twenty years after the abolition of the slave trade, they did not dare to think or to speak of anything but some system of gradual amelioration, by which slavery might perhaps be extinguished in the course of a century; and so long those who were interested in the system of oppression managed to amuse them with trivial alleviations of the evil — those who ventured to recommend more speedy & energetic steps were regarded as madmen or anarchists. But at length the philanthropists of Great Britain came to see their mistake: loudly & unanimously they demanded immediate justice to those whose rights had so long been trampled on; & then came the struggle & the victory. Be assured the violence of the opposition you meet with is no proof that your zeal has overstepped the limits of prudence. Nothing stirs so violently the evil passions of those who are interested in the maintenance of error as the bold declaration of the truth. The holding up of the truth, you say, is the only means within your reach of advancing the cause of justice:- Hold it up then, we beseech you, without fear & without compromise.

In regard to the state of religion in this country, we have not much that is new to communicate in addition to what we mentioned last year. Great efforts are still making to provide adequate religious instruction to our overgrown population; many new Churches have been opened & others are building. A very general interest also prevails in regard to the Missionary labours of the Church of Scotland in India. The Assembly's first missionary Dr. Duff has been at home for more than a year & has been exerting himself with much success in calling public attention to this object. The institution at Calcutta has succeeded beyond the most sanguine expectations, & promises to be an important means ~~of~~ of paving the way for ~~the way~~ for ~~the~~ the general introduction of the gospel & raising up native missionaries who may every where proclaim the glad sound to the degraded millions of Hindoostan. A similar institution has been established at Bombay & another is about to be established at Madras. But how much cause have Christians every where to bear in mind, that of all the means within their reach for the advancement of the Redeemer's kingdom, prayer is the most important; & that without the diligent use of this, all their other efforts are likely to yield them but a harvest of disappointments. When Christians are generally stirred up to act on the recommendation of the prophet of old, not to keep silence & to give the Lord no rest till he established & made Jerusalem a praise in the earth, what showers of blessing may we not expect on the seed they have been so long sowing in tears. May such a spirit of supplication speedily be poured out on the Churches of Britain & America; & may you who are about to enter as labourers into the vineyard of the Lord, enjoy a double measure of it.

Yours in the bonds of the Gospel.
In name & by authority of the Association
William Laughton.

Edinburgh
30th July 1836

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Received Sep 7th
1836.

by Liverpool.

Thomas Wickes
Secretary to the Society of
Inquiry on Missions
Theological Seminary - Princeton
New Jersey
United States.

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